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# How ordinary wildlife makes local green places special

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## ABSTRACT

Individuals can have meaningful experiences with iconic wildlife during holidays, but how important is experiencing ordinary wildlife near home? We investigated how wildlife shapes a bond with favourite local green places in the Netherlands. We conducted 13 walk-along interviews with participants of varying sociodemographics. Results show that experiences with ordinary wildlife can lead to three different types of place bonding. First, familiarity with ordinary wildlife can trigger (childhood) memories, leading to place identity and 'the localised self'. Second, increasing knowledge about wildlife leads to intentional wildlife encounters, accompanied by feelings of accomplishment and 'the internalised place'. Third, ordinary wildlife experiences provide feelings of 'embeddedness in *Panta Rhei*': they make individuals feel connected with the flows and cycles of nature and life. Thus, ordinary wildlife makes local green places special, as it facilitates connectedness with the world.

## KEYWORDS

Multisensory wildlife experiences; place bonding; urban society; local green places; everyday natural environment

## Introduction

Urbanised societies like the Netherlands need local green places for the health and well-being of its residents, as greenery can combat air pollution, reduce noise, moderate temperatures, catch surplus rain water, and provide food (Groenewegen, van den Berg, de Vries, & Verheij, 2006). Furthermore, contact with nature has been proven to reduce stress and mental fatigue (Groenewegen, van den Berg, Maas, Verheij, & de Vries, 2012). Accessible green in people's living environment is also important, as not everyone can travel to nature areas further from home. It can thus be regarded as an important goal for nature policy and planning to facilitate a richer biodiversity in and near places where people live, and to increase people's sense of responsibility for that biodiversity. As previous research has found that wildlife adds to the attractiveness of green places near home among a general Dutch public (Folmer, Haartsen, Buijs, & Huigen, 2016), it seems worthwhile getting more insight into how ordinary wildlife adds to a bond with local green places. These insights can help nature conservation practices in nearby green aimed at stimulating more contact with nature among urban residents.

Research into wildlife experiences thus far has predominantly focused on exotic wildlife in faraway tourism destinations (e.g. Cong, Wu, Morrison, Shu, & Wang, 2014; Curtin, 2010; Lemelin & Smale, 2006). However, from Curtin's research into wildlife tourism holidays (2009, 2010) we know that individuals relate their wildlife experiences away with their wildlife experiences at home; they connect the extraordinary and the everyday. She suggests that *wildlife seen on home soil has equal if not more importance than exotic*

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*flora and fauna seen on holiday* (p. 471) and calls for research that explores wildlife experiences near home, not only in rural or natural, but also in urban settings. Our paper aims to contribute to existing academic literature by gaining insight into how wildlife experiences shape a bond with local green places, which are used for daily and weekly leisure purposes. *Local* implies seeing a landscape, town or cityscape from the inside, by sensing and feeling a specific location that is known and familiar (Lippard, 1997). Local *green* places refer to places in which natural elements such as trees, bushes, meadows, and/or water prevail. The types of wildlife included in our study depend on what kind of animals study participants mentioned. For instance, in urban areas, relatively small, and common wildlife may be observed, such as butterflies, robins, ducks, and hedgehogs; while in rural or natural areas, it is also possible to encounter larger, and rarer wildlife, such as roe deer, snakes, and foxes.

We start this paper with an exploration of what is already known from previous research about wildlife shaping a bond with green places near home. Then we describe our research method: walk-along interviews, followed by the results on how wildlife experiences add to place bonding. We round off our paper with a concluding discussion on how local wildlife shapes everyday green places.

## Wildlife experiences and green places

Places are given an identity, and become meaningful, through experience and knowledge. Through experience, which ranges from senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch, to visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolisation, an individual understands and constructs reality (Tuan, 1977). For instance, seeing swallows flying over a field is not only a visual experience, it can also symbolise spring or summer (Mynott, 2009). Places become reality through experience and the interplay between feelings and thought (Tuan, 1977). Local places can become important and loved by meaningful experiences and memories which are shared with significant others (Tuan, 1974). However, experience and knowledge do not only attribute identities to places; persons can also derive identities from places (Lewicka, 2008). Lippard (1997) states that place is entwined with personal memory and known and unknown histories; it is part of a person's life. According to Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983), a sense of self is defined and expressed by relationships with other people, but also with places that are important in day-to-day life. In local green places, experiencing wildlife may play an important role in a person's life and form their identity.

A large part of multisensory experiences run through visual senses, which are skilled cultural practices (Jenks, 1995). Urry and Larsen (2011) call this seeing through a socio-cultural lens 'gazing'. According to them, *people gaze upon a world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education* (p. 2). Personal experiences and memories, as well as the sociocultural background of people, affect the gazing at things, and objects in particular places (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Tremblay (2008) suggests that gazing at wildlife enables people to connect wildlife with its surrounding landscape, as well as its cultural role to local communities, or its role as social or cultural symbol of a place. He argues that meanings given to wildlife can lead to place attachment. However, Franklin (2003) states that tourists' experiences go further than 'gazing' at things and objects. Besides visual senses, other senses are important in experiencing, knowing, and identifying places as well (Van Hoven, 2011). Of all the senses, olfactory experiences are the most closely tied to memory, and these memories remain relatively accurate in the passing of time (Porteous, 1985). Smells can therefore trigger strong and vivid memories related to place. With regard to environmental sounds, McCartney (2002) states that they are often unnoticed ambiances of people's everyday life. In her study on multisensory experiences in a Canadian rainforest, Van Hoven (2011) found that many environmental sounds are taken for granted, and overruled by other experiences, for instance the strain of hiking. According to McCartney (2002), people have to make a special effort to become aware of these sounds, and to listen to them.

A limited number of studies have focused on how wildlife shapes place bonding. Wilkinson, Waitt, and Gibbs (2014) explored the role of bird-watching in people's relationship with places 'at home' and 'away from home'. They found that birds can trigger feelings of belonging, even in places 'away from

**Table 1.** Sociodemographics of participants and type of local green place.

Name	Age	Gender	Place of residence	Member nature cons. organisation	Type of green place	Landscape characteristics
Johanna	30	Female	Rural	Yes	Urban park	English style historic urban park
Marian	65	Female	Rural	Yes	Protected area	Reed, marshland, lake
Astrid	43	Female	Suburban	Yes	Rural woods	Wooded estate
Helena	73	Female	Rural	Yes	Protected area	Forest and heather landscape
Hendrik	82	Male	Rural	No	Protected area	Forest and heather landscape
Yvonne	53	Female	Urban	No	Rural woods	Wooded estate
Richard	46	Male	Urban	No	Protected area	Forest and heather landscape
Bart	55	Male	Rural	No	Rural area	Land consolidation grove, agricultural land
Tim	23	Male	Urban	No	Urban park	English style historic urban park
Gerrit	55	Male	Rural	No	Suburban recreation area	Recreation park, lakes, beaches, fields, woods
Monique	43	Female	Urban	Yes	Protected area	Landscaped forest and heather park, bordering the Veluwe
Fenna	42	Female	Rural	No	Rural area	Mainland coast of Wadden Sea, agricultural land
Karin	73	Female	Rural	No	Rural area	Forest and heather landscape

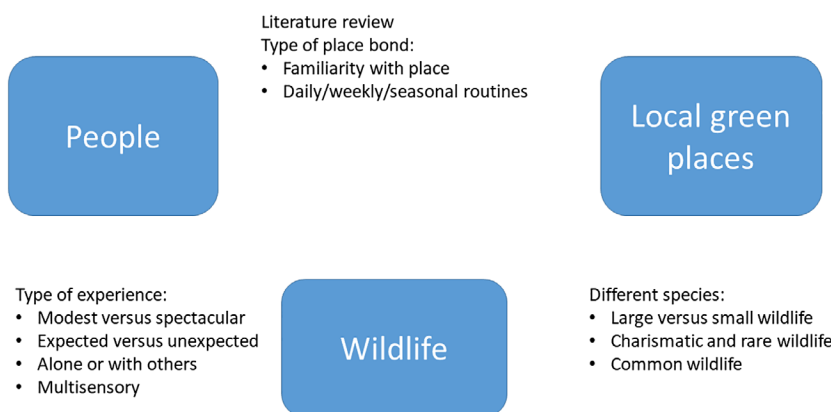
Note: First names were anonymised by replacing the true name with another name from the top 50 of participants' year of birth in the Netherlands.

home'. In tourism destinations, iconic animals have been found to create a sense of place among tourists. To illustrate, Nevin, Swain, and Convery (2012) found that the presence of polar bears make tourists perceive a landscape as authentic and wild. However, wildlife may play a different role in bonding to local places. Less exotic, more ordinary wildlife experienced near home may create a sense of place in a more subtle manner than charismatic wildlife in faraway tourism destinations. Also, the type of bond may differ, as being rooted in a place is a different kind of experience from having and cultivating a 'sense of place' (Tuan, 1977).

## Methods

Inspired by Carpiano (2009), we conducted 'walk-along' interviews to gain insight into the different ways in which wildlife contributes to shaping a bond with local green places. Walk-along interviews are a relatively novel qualitative method for studying people's relationships with places. Lynch (1960), Kusenbach (2003) and Carpiano (2006, 2007) used the method for exploring people's understanding of their daily environment. According to Carpiano (2009), walk-along interviews are used to achieve a better understanding of people's experiences, interpretations, and practices within a place, as it combines the strengths of field observation and in-depth interviews. The idea of walk-along interviews is that the researcher is taken on a tour by the study participants, thereby 'walking through' their lived experiences.

For our study we asked our participants to join them on a walk in their favourite green place near home. They selected the starting place, time of day, and the route. This made them natural guides during the interview. The walk-along interviews took place from October 2013 to September 2014, covering all seasons. The local green places ranged from urban parks, rural areas, wooded estates to protected areas (see Table 1).



**Figure 1.** Interview themes.

We recruited participants of different sociodemographics, and from both rural (<6000 inhabitants) and urban places of residence (50 000 to 200 000 inhabitants) (see Table 1). These criteria were based on previous research which had demonstrated that wildlife experiences matter in the perceived attractiveness of local green places among a general Dutch public (Folmer et al., 2016). There were no preconditions regarding participants' relationship with wildlife.

The interviewer started with a general introduction, explaining that the research was about wildlife experiences in their favourite local green place. To make them feel at ease, study participants were first asked to introduce themselves. However, it was noticed that study participants already felt quite comfortable, as they were in a familiar place. The interviewer ensured that three main themes were discussed in each interview: the type of wildlife encountered, the type of experience, and the bond with the local green place (Figure 1). There were also topics related to wildlife which came up spontaneously during the walk. Transcripts were coded using these three main themes. Using thick description and making comparisons, more in-depth aspects of these themes emerged. Thick description was first carried out for experiences with the most mentioned types of wildlife (birds and roe deer). Then comparisons were made between types of wildlife, types of places, and the importance of other people. This was followed by analysing the relationships between these aspects, which resulted in the identification of different categories of wildlife experiences. These emerging categories guided the choice of the headings in the results section. In the concluding discussion, three ways in which wildlife shapes a bond with local green places are discussed.

In general, we found that multisensory wildlife experiences among participants varied greatly. Gerrit (m, 55) and Fenna (f, 42), who had a fishery and agrarian background respectively, had relatively modest wildlife experiences, while Astrid (f, 43) and Richard (m, 46) who had a rural background, got totally immersed in observing, smelling, touching, and hearing all kinds of wildlife. Richard (m, 46) and Hendrik (m, 82) can be regarded as specialist wildlife observers. Richard (m, 46) was an illustrator, watching birds and observing small creatures for his work, while Hendrik (m, 82) had been a volunteer for a nature conservation organisation, which included activities such as listing different wildlife and flora species. They were also the only two participants who went off-track during the walk. The other participants were not wildlife specialists, as they acknowledged that they did not know many different types of birds, did not search actively for animal tracks or wildlife encounters, and did not use any special equipment such as binoculars.

While doing walk along interviews, we noticed several strengths compared to off-site interviews. We observed interactions between the participant and wildlife, and with other people. We observed what kind of routes were taken (e.g. off track), how the routes were chosen, where participants paused, and whether binoculars and cameras were used. Another strength of the walk-along interviews was

that multisensory experiences of the place—such as smells, sounds, and sights—triggered memories, which may not happen in another setting. Dependence on the weather was a limitation: one interview had to be postponed and another interview had to be cut short due to heavy rainfall.

## Results

### *Multisensory experiences of birds*

Experiencing birds emerged as very influential in place bonding. Birds mattered in the experience of each favourite local green place, regardless of location in an urban, rural or natural area. Several participants stated that hearing birdsong in their favourite local green place gave them a feeling of happiness. On her walk-along interview in the Lauwersmeer National Park, a wetland with reed, marshland and lakes, the first thing Marian (f, 65) did was go to the place where she sometimes hears swans sing. She said:

*... when there are lots of swans, it is like hearing a choir. It gives a very rich feeling, very emotional actually. Because you can experience it only very rarely ... (silence), then you think, I am so lucky to hear this. And then I want to go there again.*

The swans' musical performance made her feel privileged, special, and rich. It made her become attached to the place, as she wanted to go back to the place over and over again. While walking into the forest estate, Astrid (f, 43) announced:

*Well, those birds ... There are very many, you see very many. And sometimes you have the feeling of being in a theatre. You hear all the sounds, you see the birds fly, and sometimes they fly along with you.*

The perception of birds and butterflies flying alongside with her, made her part of the performance, and part of the place. Edensor (2000) argues that when the movement of walking is shared with wildlife, it expresses a connection between the individual and the surrounding place. Astrid's experience also illustrates Waitt, Gill, and Head's (2009) observation, that while walking in a forest, boundaries between *people, plants, animals and places are relational, active, dynamic, ongoing, and fluid* (p. 44). The comparisons that Astrid (f, 43) and Marian (f, 65) made with a theatre, dance, and a choir correspond with findings of Curtin (2009), that people perceive wildlife encounters as an analogy of performing arts, theatre, and ballet. This expresses an emotional response of awe and wonder (Curtin, 2009). Both Astrid (f, 43) and Marian (f, 65) articulated their admiration for the movements and sounds of the animals. The idea that birds are performing for them implies that birds are intentionally present. Hearing and seeing birds, moving with birds through the forest, and the emotions which were triggered by these experiences, made the place special to them.

Several participants mentioned that birdsong helps them to unwind, to distance themselves from everyday life, empty their heads, and become re-energised, which is a main reason why green places contribute to people's health and well-being. By hearing birdsong, a place becomes a pause in time (Tuan, 1977), a getaway from modern fast-moving society. Participants said that they needed to be alone to focus their attention on birdsong. Tim (m, 23) often visited his favourite local green place—a small urban park—with his mother, and mentioned that he was often not aware of birdsong, because he was walking and talking with his mother. Only when they sat down, and were quiet, did they become aware of birds. Tim (m, 23) stated that seeing and hearing birds made the place beautiful and peaceful to him. As McCartney (2002) suggests, Tim (m, 23) had to make an effort to pay attention to birdsong, and listen to it. By standing still and taking in birdsong and other aspects of the local green place, attachment can take shape. Thrift (2000) stresses that much of human life is lived in unconscious awareness. Only the conscious awareness makes it possible for people to contemplate and reflect on what they see, hear or otherwise sense. Sitting on a bench, and actively focusing attention on the surroundings, makes place bonding possible. Astrid (f, 43) found that birds make her more aware of the present:

*Birds help you to stand with both feet in the here and now. And not continuously thinking about soon, later, and yesterday.*

Some of our participants were aware that by experiencing nature, lived time slowly disappears (Lefebvre, 1991). The perception that 'time stands still' also supports arguments made by Thrift (2000), that being in nature can lead to an expanded awareness of the present time, which enables people to contemplate,



and wonder. Seeing and hearing birds helps to get into this state of mind, and bond with the place. Clearly, birds make local green places special to participants; from small urban parks to large protected areas.

### **Modest wildlife encounters**

Most participants visited their local green place to walk, contemplate, and enjoy the surroundings. During these walks, they had regular encounters with ordinary wildlife. These regular encounters occurred in urban, rural, and natural types of green places. When they encountered local wildlife like deer, hares, foxes or squirrels during their walk, participants said they stood still and observed them, until they were gone. In addition, regularly observed wildlife such as great tits, robins, swans, geese, hares, deer, squirrels, frogs, and beetles were described in emotional words as 'beautiful', 'wonderful', 'fantastic', and 'cute'. Astrid (f, 43), Monique (f, 44), and Tim (m, 23) stated that seeing ordinary wildlife made them feel happy. Observing local wildlife, and hearing birdsong, created for them a sense of the beauty of the place. These regular encounters in a familiar place illustrate Tuan's (1977) argument, that modest events can in time build strong sentiments for a place.

Individual animals also played a role in the development of attachment. Johanna (f, 30) said that, almost every day, she would go into her favourite urban park, to see how a swan family was doing, while Monique (f, 44) observed the behaviour of a group of six teenage 'rebel' ducks every time she visited her favourite local green place, a wooded estate. Their expected presence was a reason to go there, and both Johanna (f, 30) and Monique (f, 44) enjoyed watching them. The certainty dimension of emotion (Hosany, 2012) plays an important role in how these kind of modest wildlife encounters shape emotional bonds with a place. The expected presence of wildlife leads to emotions such as hope and surprise (Roseman, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), as well as love, happiness, pride, and gratitude (Ruth, Brunel, & Otnes, 2002). Thus, the expected presence of individual animals can foster the emotional bond with a place, from urban parks to large protected areas.

### **Extraordinary wildlife encounters**

Besides modest wildlife encounters, several participants also experienced extraordinary wildlife encounters, for instance, seeing rare behaviour of wildlife, getting very close to wildlife, or seeing a certain type of wildlife for the first time. These encounters made participants feel privileged, as if they were destined to be there, and as if the animal(s) were intentionally performing for them. Special wildlife encounters occurred more in rural and natural places than in urban places. Many unexpected wildlife encounters, especially with deer, foxes, and snakes, were described as a gift, which is associated with positive emotions such as surprise and joy (Hosany, 2012). For instance, Fenna (f, 42), who had lived her whole life on the agrarian mainland bordering the Wadden Sea, went to look over the dike on her wedding day. To her surprise, she saw a group of flamingos on the Wad. She had never seen them before, and has never seen them since. She felt as if they were there especially for her. As DeMares and Krycka (1998) discovered, intention can be a characteristic of a peak experience. For Fenna's (f, 42), the appearance of the flamingos felt intentional and made her feel privileged, which enforced her bond with the Wadden Sea.

Witnessing rare behaviour of wildlife can also trigger feelings of being privileged and rewarded by a place. Hendrik (m, 82) had often seen foxes in his favourite local green place—a protected area with forest and heather landscape. However, he once had a special encounter with a fox:

*Then you arrive quite unseen at that beautiful, tranquil field ... There I once stood for more than half an hour observing a fox who was catching dragonflies in the middle of the meadow ... Yes, then I may as well stop cycling after that, because my afternoon is complete.*

He stated that he perceived this event as special, because he knew that most people will never see a fox in their life. Due to feeling privileged, the place became meaningful to him.



The first time participants encountered a certain type of wildlife in their lives can also create long-lasting bonds with a place. First time encounters often served as anecdote in the interviews. For his walk-along interview, Richard (m, 46) had chosen to visit a heather field where he had spotted an adder for the first time in his life. He said that when he saw the adder, he was first shocked, then pleasantly surprised, and finally thrilled. Since that time it had become one of his favourite local green places to look for snakes, lizards, and other small animals. He started visiting the place more often and it became one of his most favourite local green places. Novel or unexpected events can lead to surprise, which is a short-lived emotion (Izard, 1977; Meyer, Reisenzein, & Schützwohl, 1997). Positive surprise has been associated with joy, a higher satisfaction and loyalty (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). In addition, positive surprises can enhance a person's sense of well-being and happiness with life (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Sirgy, 2010). Thus, special wildlife encounters, which mainly occur in rural and natural green places, can lead to a high loyalty and strong bond.

### ***Rewarding wildlife encounters***

Richard (m, 46) and Hendrik (m, 82) actively searched for certain types of wildlife by going off the path, into heather fields and grassland. Searching and encountering wildlife which is difficult to find can give people emotional satisfaction, because knowledge about the place, as well as wildlife, is necessary. For instance, during the walk-along interview, Richard (m, 46) searched for snakes in the heather of National Park Balloërveld. Knowledge about the place, and about the behaviour and preferences of the snake was clearly necessary to find it. The effort of looking for the snake, and the uncertainty of finding it, increased the pleasure and joy once a snake was eventually found. When shortly after, two people with dogs passed on the main path, Richard (m, 46) stated: *They will never see snakes*. This made clear that he perceived a distinction between him and 'others' who did not go off the path. This made the place more 'his' place. Hendrik (m, 82) also experienced rewarding moments, encountering wildlife in places other people did not know about. Hosany (2012) found that the main aspects of positive emotions (joy, love, and positive surprise) were formed by appraisals of pleasantness, goal congruence, and internal self-compatibility. All these aspects are attended to when actively seeking wildlife encounters. Searching for wildlife is a relatively intense activity and both Jan (m, 82) and Richard (m, 46) were totally immersed in their surroundings. Their feelings of concentration, deep involvement, and a sense of accomplishment corresponds with an experience of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As a result of their efforts, they made the wildlife encounter happen, resulting in feelings of pride and happiness. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) flow experiences form the best moments in life. Rewarding wildlife encounters can thus lead to a strong emotional bond with a place. In our interviews, rewarding wildlife encounters mainly occurred in rural and natural green places.

### ***Wildlife, childhood memories, and shared experiences***

Multisensory wildlife experiences in a green place can also take a person back in time. Wildlife triggered meaningful memories in urban, rural, and natural green places, but especially in (similar) places where participants had grown up. Especially seeing and hearing birds triggered childhood memories for several participants. Karin (f, 76) had recently—after an absence of 50 years—moved back to the place where she had grown up. She made daily walks in the nearby forest, which was filled with happy and meaningful memories from her youth; learning how to swim, roasting fish with boys, and skating on a forest pond. She was hardly aware of wildlife, but enjoyed seeing and hearing familiar birds. They reminded her of her father, who was very good at recognising birds. The birds acted as stable elements in a changing environment. The favourite local green place of Bart (m, 55) was also the place where he had grown up, even though he now lived somewhere else. While walking through the land consolidation grove and along the meadows which he had known since childhood, Bart (m, 55) contemplated his past. Through his stories, it became clear that his biography was intertwined with the place. During the walk, many memories sprang up, set off by the multi-sensory experiences of the surroundings (seeing

the landscape, smelling the soil, hearing birdsong, seeing the sunlight through the trees, feeling the changing temperatures). At one point, he said:

*Here, I looked for lapwing eggs with my uncles. They let me find the egg. They said: Stop, don't walk any further, there is a nest nearby. When I found the egg, it made me feel very proud.*

Looking for and protecting lapwing eggs is an old Frisian tradition and part of the local culture. For Jan (m, 55), seeking lapwing eggs had an emotional dimension, as he felt proud when he found the egg. This activity bonded Jan to his place in multiple ways; it was a shared experience with family members, it made him feel part of the local culture, it had an economic function, as eggs were a source of food and money, and it contributed to an emotional bond with the place. Being attached to the place where people grew up is a common human emotion, according to Tuan (1977). Most other participants also mentioned the role of family members and their own role as teacher, in transferring knowledge and skills related to wildlife. The important role of family members in childhood wildlife memories add greatly to the meaningfulness of a place. This supports Tuan's (1977) argument that other human beings are the main source of giving meaning to a place.

### ***Wildlife, natural rhythms, and sense of self***

Besides making participants aware of the present and the past, experiencing wildlife also made participants aware of natural rhythms and of being part of a larger whole. Birds were mentioned most often in relation to natural cycles, especially seasons and time of the day. Many participants mentioned enjoying birdsong announcing spring. Some participants also focused their attention on hearing and seeing migrating birds flying over as a sign of a particular season. Atypical behaviour was also noted, for instance, swans having young ones in early winter, or birdsong associated with spring heard in the middle of the winter. Wildlife behaviour is steered by cyclical rhythms, originating in the cosmos, in nature, days, nights, seasons, the tides, monthly cycles (Lefebvre, 2004). When participants turn their attention towards wildlife, they are brought back in touch with these natural rhythms. Edensor (2010) argues that these regular routines and slower processes of change offer some sense of stability, as they exist longer than the human lifespan. Most participants valued exactly this aspect of experiencing wildlife in their local green place: the awareness of their lives being just a small part of a larger whole. Astrid (f, 43), Yvonne (f, 55), Bart (m, 55), and Monique (f, 44) mentioned specifically that experiencing wildlife in their natural habitat gives them the idea of being part of a larger system. This gave them comfort, especially when going through difficult times in their lives. Astrid (f, 43) said seeing and hearing birds, seeing squirrels and other wildlife in her local forest consoled her, because everything in nature is simple, and clear. Yvonne (f, 55) stated that being in her favourite green place, which is a wooded estate, gives her a sense of authenticity, as she can be who she really is. She feels part of a larger universe, which she can't change, so she surrenders to sensing the place, by seeing and hearing birds, smelling different types of soil, touching plants and feeling and hearing the wind through the trees. When asked how he felt in his local green place, Bart (m, 55) said, after a silence:

*When I am fishing, I enjoy the warmth and cosiness most. You are sitting there, feeling one with nature.*

He hesitated and took some time to answer the question, suggesting that he had to think very hard about how he felt. Tuan (1977) states that these kind of intimate experiences lie deep within participants' being, so that they often lack the words to express their feelings. He felt in his place. He said that all that he needs in his life is there, around him. That made him feel happy. His feeling of being one with nature echoes Maslow's (1970) statement that, one day, people's appreciation of nature will *be understood as a kind of self-recognition, a way of being at home, a kind of biological authenticity...* (pp. 321–322). Local wildlife, whether experienced in urban parks or large protected areas, can remind individuals of the essence of existence; connecting individuals with being alive, and being part of the world.

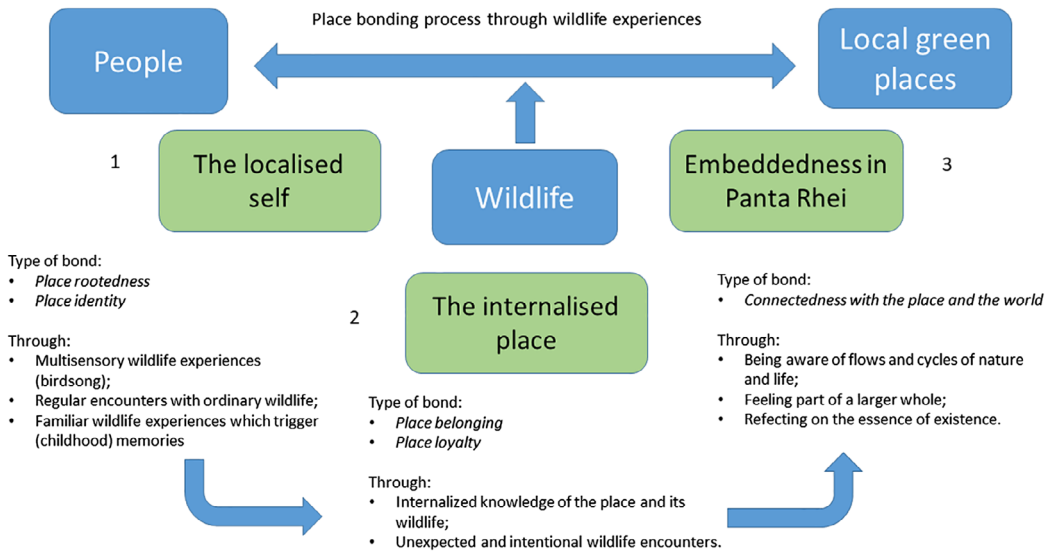


Figure 2. Three ways in which wildlife shapes people's bond with local green places.

## Concluding discussion

Concluding, it can be stated that wildlife adds to the intensity of nature experiences in local green places in multiple ways. Modest, special, rewarding, and childhood wildlife experiences strongly influence people's bond with local green places, and make these places special. Birds in particular play a prominent role in shaping people's bond with local green places. The results of our study clearly connect to the observations in literature on the restorative effects of nature and wildlife on human wellbeing (Curtin, 2009, 2010; Groenewegen et al., 2012; Van den Berg, Maas, Verheij, & Groenewegen, 2010). However, by focusing on wildlife experiences in *local* green places, our study provides an extra dimension to the body of knowledge on how these restorative effects work: the aspect of being familiar with the place. On the grounds of repeated visits, people build a relationship with local wildlife and the place. We distinguish three ways of how wildlife shapes a bond with local green places: the localised self, the internalised place, and embeddedness in Panta Rhei (Figure 2).

First of all, and in line with findings of Curtin (2009, 2010) and DeMares and Krycka (1998), we found that multisensory wildlife experiences contribute to finding the real self, a person's identity, and feelings of being one with nature. Yet, wildlife experiences in a *familiar* place seem to result in rooted feelings of finding the real self: *the localised self* (Figure 2). This happens in many different, personal, and unique ways, as wildlife experiences in specific places are often strongly entwined with a person's (past) life biography. Wildlife experiences trigger childhood memories, especially memories shared with significant others, but they can also bring to mind more recent experiences. The predictability and familiarity of the behaviour of wildlife make individuals feel comfortable, authentic, and happy in their local green place.

Secondly, the familiarity and predictability of the presence of certain types of wildlife seem to form an extra stimulant for emotions such as joy and happiness, shaping an emotional bond with the place. Having internalised knowledge of the place and its non-human inhabitants makes a person more successful in seeking wildlife encounters, affording a sense of accomplishment and pride. These emotions give scope for strong feelings of place belonging. Yet, unexpected and rare wildlife experiences which are not predictable, and do not need specialised skills, can also add to place belonging. These wildlife experiences feel intentional, as if wildlife is making itself visible or audible to the person. These experiences give rise to feelings of being privileged by the place. They make people (want to) come back. Both expected and unexpected wildlife encounters, with both special and more ordinary wildlife,

result in people feeling privileged and rewarded for investing time in the specific habitat. This leads to caring for the place, becoming loyal, and having a strong emotional bond with the place. The awareness of being specialised in encountering wildlife, and/or the feeling of being rewarded with special wildlife experiences, makes the place ‘their place’: *the internalised place* (Figure 2).

Thirdly, because nearby green places allow for repeated visits throughout the year, people gain insight into seasonal patterns, and the related wildlife behaviour they observe *in situ*. Wildlife adds permanence to a place, because wildlife has the same routines, such as building nests, migrating, and announcing spring, year after year. These recurring routines can give comfort and a sense of stability in life. They make individuals reflect on their own lives, their past, their future, significant others, and on the continuing natural cycles of life and death. Individuals feel part of a larger whole by focusing their attention on wildlife and wildlife behaviour. Wildlife reminds individuals of the essence of existence. It provides people with *embeddedness in Panta Rhei*: the flows and cycles of nature and life (Figure 2).

From our research it can be concluded that the presence of local wildlife is very important in connecting people with everyday green places. This corresponds with Franklin (2003) who states that tourism and leisure experience are ways of (re)connecting with the world, rather than escaping it. Ordinary wildlife nests people in time and place, it reinforces people’s place identities, and it gives rise to a sense of ‘being-in-the-world’ as referred to by Malpas (1999): engaging people with the world, making people reflect on the world, and giving people the opportunity to find themselves in the world. Thus, ordinary wildlife can make local green places special, even in a highly urbanised society such as the Netherlands.

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